



# STATE OF IOWA

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## IOWA OFFICE OF DRUG CONTROL POLICY LAUNCHES “TAKE A DOSE OF TRUTH” CAMPAIGN

*Campaign to Raise Awareness of Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Abuse*

DES MOINES, Iowa—The Iowa Governor’s Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP), in alliance with the Partnership for a Drug-Free Iowa, today launched the “Take a Dose of Truth” campaign to increase parent awareness of the risks associated with the rising abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs by Iowa teens. The campaign project, which includes tools to help prevent Rx and OTC abuse, was funded by a grant secured by U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin.

“The abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs is a growing problem in our country, and one that has had devastating effects in Iowa,” said Harkin. “It is deeply troubling that one in five teens nationally reports intentionally abusing prescription drugs to get high, and one in 10 reports abusing cough medicine to get high.”

Harkin was referencing the 2005 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. The 2008 Iowa Youth Study found that 7 percent of Iowa 11th-graders said they had misused prescription drugs in the previous 30 days.

“According to a recent University of Iowa report for the State Department of Public Health, unintentional poisoning deaths in Iowa increased 85 percent between 2002 and 2006, due largely to lethal combinations of medications and illicit drugs or alcohol,” said Gary Kendell, ODCP director. “We’re also seeing evidence of rising teen prescription drug abuse in Iowa.”

At Mercy Medical Center in Des Moines, 94 of the 111 drug and alcohol overdoses reported at the children's emergency center between June 15 and Dec. 15, 2008, involved prescription or over-the-counter medications.

And in February 2009, a 14-year-old Des Moines resident died from an overdose of prescription drugs, according to the Polk County Medical Examiner’s Office.

“It’s very saddening and disturbing to learn a young Iowan has died of a prescription drug overdose,” continued Kendell. “It’s more important now than ever to make parents aware of the risks and to help reduce access—access to these drugs is just too easy.”

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So easy that prescription medicines are the number one drug of abuse among 12- to 13-year-olds, according to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Painkillers, such as Vicodin and OxyContin, are the type of prescription drug abused most frequently. The PATS study found that every day 2,500 youth ages 12 to 17 abuse a pain reliever for the very first time in the U.S. Other drugs commonly abused include central nervous system depressants such as Xanax or Valium, and stimulants such as Ritalin and Adderall, which are used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children.

The Iowa Poison Control Center reported this year that seven people, ages 13 to 24, presented symptoms of ADHD medicine abuse at eastern Iowa hospitals within a four-day period. Iowa Poison Center calls related to ADHD medicine abuse have doubled in Iowa during the past five years.

“That is why the Iowa Rx/OTC awareness campaign by the Office of Drug Control Policy is so important,” said Harkin. “Our teens and adults must understand that while these products have great benefits, there are harms and dangers from misuse and abuse.”

According to the PATS study, about 30 percent of teens (7 million) in the U.S. believe there is “nothing wrong” with using Rx medicine without a prescription “once in a while” and that prescription painkillers are not addictive. And 40 percent of teens reported that they believe Rx medicines are much safer than illegal drugs.

“One of the most moving elements of the Take a Dose of Truth campaign is a television public service announcement (PSA) telling the true story of a Dubuque girl who accidentally overdosed on prescribed antidepressants and painkillers,” said Kendell. “FDA-approved drugs, when not used as intended or prescribed, are every bit as dangerous as illegal drugs. This tragic case was a matter of taking a double dose of pain medicine with another pill, and the combination proved deadly.”

In addition to three television PSAs, other elements of the Take a Dose of Truth campaign include radio and print PSAs, a brochure and a new interactive Web site complete with tools for parents, plus online curriculum materials for professionals.

The campaign also targets Iowa’s older-adult population and their caregivers, as those over age 65 are often prescribed many different medications and are at risk of unintentionally misusing their drugs.

“When one of the public service messages is seen or heard, it provides an opportunity for Iowans to strike up a conversation with family members about medicine abuse and its dangers,” continued Kendell. “I strongly urge Iowa parents and caregivers to visit [TakeADoseOfTruth.com](http://TakeADoseOfTruth.com) to increase their awareness of the problem, learn how to talk with loved ones about the issue, and see how to properly secure and dispose of medicines to prevent prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse and protect the environment.”

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### SIDEBAR:

The Iowa Governor's Office on Drug Control Policy offers the following tips for parents on how to talk with their teen about Rx and OTC medicine abuse and misuse.

- **Don't worry about having all the facts**, but know the truth. It's more important that you express how you'd feel if your child used prescription or OTC drugs, or any other drug, and the impact it could have on your family.
- **Dispel the myth.** Many teens believe prescription and OTC drugs are less harmful than street drugs because they are available through a doctor or at the local drug store. Remind them that these medicines are still drugs and that they can be just as harmful as illegal drugs if not taken when needed or as directed.
- **Talk about the risk.** Be specific—tell them that taking prescription or OTC drugs without a doctor's approval and supervision can be a dangerous — even deadly — decision. Also remind them that taking a prescription that is not prescribed specifically for them is illegal.
- **Cover the consequences.** If your child is age appropriate, tell them about the distasteful consequences of abusing prescription or OTC drugs such as vomiting, unwanted sexual behavior or blacking out (not remembering what they did).
- **Set clear rules about drug use.** Let your child or teen know in advance the consequences for violating the established rules. Make it clear that teens should never take prescription or OTC drugs with illicit drugs or alcohol.
- **Set the stage for more discussion.** Know that you will have discussions about prescription and OTC drugs several times. Talking to your kid about drugs is not a one-time event.

The mission of the Governor's Office on Drug Control Policy is to serve as a leader and a catalyst for improving the health and safety of all Iowans by promoting strategic approaches and collaboration to reduce drug use and related crime. For more information on the office, visit [www.iowa.gov/odcp](http://www.iowa.gov/odcp) and for more information on OTC and Rx medicine abuse and misuse campaign, visit [www.TakeADoseOfTruth.com](http://www.TakeADoseOfTruth.com).

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